

Sociobiological Theory and Casual Encounters on Craigslist

An Honors Thesis (PSYSC 499)

By

Christine McLean

Thesis Advisor

George A. Gaither, PhD.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George A. Gaither", with a stylized, cursive script.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May 2010

Expected Date of Graduation

May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

## Abstract

Existing research on mating strategies in sociobiological theory focuses largely on long-term mating strategies, and has found differences in the behavior and preferences of men and women (see Wiederman 1993). The current study focused on short-term mating strategies by studying 1,724 hook-up advertisements from Craigslist.com for men seeking women and women seeking men to see if observed gender differences persist when the goal of mating is not reproduction. Results showed that while men's mating strategies do not appear to differ based on the goal of mating, the behavior of women is inconsistent with sociobiological theory when the goal of mating is simply sex and not reproduction. Risk-taking behavior (contraceptive use, drug use, sexually transmitted infections) was also assessed for frequency. Repercussions for sociobiological theory are discussed, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express immeasurable gratitude toward Dr. George A. Gaither, without whose help and guidance this entire endeavor would have been next to impossible. His unending support and approachability have made the experience of completing an honors thesis incredibly positive and fulfilling.

I would also like to thank my research assistants: Lauren, Jordan, TomMario, Ashley, Amanda, and Alison, without whose patience and punctuality the data collection could not have taken place.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. David Perkins and my fellow students in my psychological science honors seminar, whose advice and encouragement contributed greatly to the completion of this project and helped me keep my head up when the end seemed unreachable.

## Sociobiological Theory and Casual Encounters on Craigslist

Natural selection, being the means by which those traits most suited to survival perpetuate, has had a significant impact on human behavior. Sexual selection, a subcategory of natural selection, posits that the survival of the “fittest” means the survival of the most reproductively successful (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Part of sexual selection is not only having the best genes, being the most attractive, and having the highest status, but also having the ability to recognize said qualities in potential mates (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Buss, 2007). Thus, humans have evolved with innate preferences (Buss 1989) which are made evident in our behavior even when the goal of mating is not aimed at the evolutionary goal of reproduction (Schmitt, 2006).

These sociobiological preferences tend to differ for men and women. Men have evolved in such a way that their sexual mating behavior is meant to propagate their genes as much as possible, with as many females as possible, and females, being naturally more invested in the lives of their offspring than males, have evolved in such a way to elicit help from the biological father or others in order to successfully raise their children (Muscarella, 2000; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Men therefore adopt a more short term mating strategy, in which a relationship with a female is meant to consist of many opportunities to reproduce in a short amount of time (Buss, 1994). This strategy, though not necessarily a conscious effort, is meant to solve several reproductive problems, such as those of choosing which women are fertile and contributing the least amount of investment possible (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). This mating strategy then comes with other natural inclinations, such as the male preference for youth and attractiveness. Attractive women in their reproductive prime are assumed to be fertile and have good genes (Buss, 1994). The male preference for physical attractiveness then serves an intuitively evolutionary beneficial purpose.



Women on the other hand, according to sociobiological theory, have sex based on long term intentions. Reproduction is meant to be with a stable male who has resources available to support offspring (Buss, 1994). Let it be noted, however, that despite the evolutionary value of long-term mating strategies in women and short-term mating strategies in men that these lines may blur. Long-term and short-term mating strategies are thought to solve different problems of survival in evolutionary theory, and are observed in the behavior of both men and women (Buss & Schmitt, 1993).

In response to advancing technology, a line of research has emerged in personal advertisements. Personal ads usually lean toward a relationship goal, although not always. A study by Wiederman (1993) looked at over 1,100 personal ads posted in a newspaper and analyzed them from a sociobiological perspective. The researcher hypothesized that men and women would post in accordance with evolutionary theory, specifically that the frequency of posting would be a function of gender and age. He hypothesized that women over 40 and men under 40 would be more likely to post than their counterparts, that women would desire financial stability in a partner, and that men would desire physical attractiveness in a partner.

He found that plenty of women will advertise to seek friendship that may eventually evolve into a relationship, or friendship with no further intentions mentioned. Women were found to be three times more like than men to strictly seek companionship in these ads, and twice as likely as men to search for friendship that could evolve into a relationship. Furthermore, men were found to be forty times more likely to advertise for a strictly sexual relationship (Wiederman, 1993). This study found support for sociobiological theory: men under 40 advertised more than men over 40, theoretically because of their lack of acquired resources, women over 40 advertised more than women under 40, theoretically because of their deteriorating fertility. Men were more

likely to mention the desired physical attractiveness of a mate, and women were more likely to mention their own physical attractiveness in advertising. Similarly, men were more likely to mention desired body type and women were more likely to mention their own body type in advertising. Also stemming from the desire for physical attractiveness, men were more likely to request a photograph of a woman. Women, however, were more likely to mention the desire for financial resources in a mate, and men were more likely to mention their acquired resources in advertising. Similarly, women were expected to be more likely than men to look for traits that could lead to resource acquisition, such as ambition, although this gender difference was not found. Women were more likely than men to seek “honesty” and “security,” theoretically to ensure the absence of extra-pair copulations and to ensure trustworthiness as a resource provider. Men were more likely than women to seek a strictly sexual relationship with no further involvement, whereas women were more likely to desire a platonic stage before a relationship was initiated. Men were more likely to desire a younger mate, with the discrepancy between his own age and the desired partner’s increasing with age, and women were more likely to pursue older men, with the age discrepancy decreasing over the lifespan.

As seen in the study described above, pursuing a long-term mating strategy means searching for certain traits in a partner as well as advertising certain personal traits that should increase the probability of copulation. These traits tend to be those posited by sociobiological theory. Women, for example, are more likely to be reproductively successful if they are physically attractive, and therefore they often advertise this quality when searching for a partner for a long-term relationship. Men, on the other hand, should advertise those traits that make them appear a suitable mate and father. These traits would be financial stability, trustworthiness, honesty, etc. Physical appearance should be much less important for women than it is for men



(although it is not entirely unimportant). Long-term mating strategies therefore tend to focus on the acquisition of a reproductively desirable partner.

If sociobiological theory is correct, long-term mating strategies were developed in such a way that offspring produced have a good chance of surviving to reproductive age themselves . The sociobiological purpose of mating is offspring production. Other repercussions or emotions (i.e. sexual pleasure, jealousy, love) are meant to increase the likelihood that offspring will grow up in an environment with two parents, who have given the child good genes and can now provide a safe and stable environment in which to thrive (Schmitt, 2006). These are the kinds of strategies used in most personal advertisements, on which most current research of sociobiological theory and advertising is based. From this field of research one would draw the conclusion that the only real purpose that sexuality serves is that of reproduction. But if we turn our attention to a largely ignored field of research, that of short-term encounters, we see that there is more to sex than procreation.

While a plethora of research seems to exist on long-term mating strategies, (Rusu & Bencic, 2007; Leighton Dawson, McIntosh & William, 2006; Wilson, McIntosh & Isana, 2007; Groom & Pennebaker, 2005; Wiederman, 1993) the category of short-term mating and casual encounters has been largely neglected, especially in the online environment. This area badly needs research attention because as technology continues to advance the strategy of using the internet to find sex partners is likely to become more and more prevalent. The risks associated with using this method are numerous and serious. Meeting strangers for sex means an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, and sexual violence and exploitation (Horvath, Rosser & Remafedi, 2008).

A study constructed by Grammar, Renninger, and Fischer (2004) involved women who attended discotheques in Austria and demonstrated the use of short-term mating strategies in women. Upon entering the discotheque, the researchers asked them if they would participate in a fashion study, and then took a full-length photo of them from the front and back. They were then asked to fill out a questionnaire concerning their relationship status, whether their partner was present at the discotheque, their sexual intentions for the night, whether they used oral contraceptives, and to rate their outfit on a Likert-type scale ranging from natural to bold/sexy. They were also asked to spit into a vial, for the purpose of hormone content analysis. The study found support for the evolutionary theory that committed women are more likely to participate in extra-pair copulation (a short-term mating strategy) during their more fertile times of the month (as measured by hormone content in saliva). This study found a positive correlation between testosterone levels and intentions to flirt/meet new people in committed women whose partners were not present. This lends itself to the idea that women are more likely to commit extra-pair copulation during the more fertile phases of the menstrual cycle. It is possible then that the women who post on casual encounter forums on the internet may in the ovulatory part of their menstrual cycles, and as such are adapting a short-term mating strategy. This seemingly male approach to mating is in fact adaptive in women. By creating sperm competition the woman is providing for increased genetic quality in the offspring, which is especially adaptive when she already has a mate to provide resources for a child. However, being caught committing extra-pair copulation could be detrimental to the woman's relationship with a resource-providing male, and this could be avoided by using the online environment: it is discrete and quick, and easy to cover up. This article provides a descriptive and meaningful evolutionary basis for the short-term mating behavior of women on internet hookup sites.



One of the more popular sites for online hookups is Craigslist.org, specifically the casual encounters forum. It is important to note that Craigslist is not primarily a hookup site, but offers all sorts of classifieds and local forums. A Craigslist user can find anything on the site from a job, to a car, to advice. It is community moderated and, for the most part, free of charge. All of the forums on Craigslist are entirely public domain, and can be accessed by anyone with access to the internet. This is true even of the casual encounter forums, on which people tend to post explicit pictures of themselves and write very vulgar things. The Craigslist website attests to users self-publishing over 50 million new classifieds advertisements each month (Craigslist.org).

The accessibility and high volume usage make Craigslist's casual encounter forums an ideal site for sexuality research. In a 2006 study by May, Craigslist was used to contact and interview women who had used the site to "hook up" in the past. This study detailed the online hookup terminology used on these sites (i.e. "NSA = No Strings Attached," "DDF = Drug and Disease Free"), as well as the necessity to "read between the lines" when viewing posts on Craigslist's casual encounters forum. The desire to meet for sex is often disguised as an "erotic massage" or other equally misleading title, although many posts are also quite blunt and to the point. The interviews conducted for this study revealed that women find Craigslist's casual encounters forum to be an easy venue for finding sex partners, and like that the intention to engage in casual sex is clear when visiting the site. The researcher also explained that this anonymous venue provides a means for women to disobey the gender norms and sex roles placed on them by society.

### *The Current Study*

The results of this study are expected to refute evolutionary long-term mating strategies in some ways. While women should still be more interested in resources in a mate than men,

they should be less so than in a long-term situation, as they are having sex for pleasure, not for purposes of procreation which would require mate investment. Similarly, women will be more interested in physical attractiveness than they would be in a long term partner, because other reproductively valuable characteristics (acquired resources, trustworthiness) are irrelevant (Li & Kenrick, 2006). Furthermore, men should be less concerned about physical appearance than they would be for long-term purposes, as the perceived fertility of a mate should be considered unimportant when the relationship is not based on the production of offspring. The age of posters is expected to be congruent with that mentioned by Wiederman (2003), women over 40 and men under 40 being more likely to post. This study will also look at casual encounters in terms of their inherent risks: anonymous sex places individuals at higher risk for STIs and unwanted pregnancy, two ramifications that badly need research attention.

For the current study, ethical concerns regarding privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity have been considered according to the suggestions of Eysenbach & Till (2001). The researcher intends to explore the “anonymous” posts on the casual encounters forums on Craigslist.com and discover the commonalities and differences according to the sex of the poster and the sex of the target (i.e. men seeking women versus women seeking men). The advertisements posted by these groups of people will be compared according to the following variables: the presence/absence of photos, the explicitness of each photo, the mention of protection/birth control, specific requests about body type, the mention of sexually transmitted infections, age of poster, age of target, mention of possession of resources, mention of desire for resources, and the use of drugs or tolerance for drug use.

The researcher’s hypotheses regarding these variables are as follows: Overall, men will post more frequently than women, as evolutionarily they should be more interested in short-term



mating. Men will post more photos than women, and will use more explicit photos than women, as they are the more visual of the two sexes (Bailey et al., 1994). Only a small minority of posts will mention birth control or protection, and most of them will be by women, as they traditionally will have more responsibility for a child if born, and they are at higher risk of complications from STI's (Lucke, 1998). Men will make specific requests concerning body type more often than women, again being more visual creatures, and evolutionarily being more interested in the perceived fertility of a partner (rather than resources; Wiederman, 1993), while women will advertise their physical appearance more. Very few, if any, posts will mention carrying a sexually transmitted infection, as this would hurt their chances of copulation. Many posts will mention drug use. Following the findings of Wiederman (2003), men under the age of 40 and women over the age of 40 will be more likely to post, and finally women will be more likely to mention the desire for financial resources while men will be more likely to advertise the possession of financial resources.

## Method

### *Participants*

The subjects studied were 1,724 online advertisements from Craigslist.com. The advertisements being studied were those posted under the following headings: men seeking women (M4W,  $N = 1102$ ), and women seeking men (W4M,  $N = 622$ ). They were found under the term "casual encounters" on Craigslist.com and included all of the posts before 5:00pm from one day in the following cities: Boston, Seattle, Chicago, Phoenix, and Atlanta.

Table 1. Sample Sizes in Each City and Category.

	Atlanta	Boston	Chicago	Phoenix	Seattle	Totals
m4w	171	243	176	204	308	1102

w4m	114	27	117	21	343	622
Totals	285	270	293	225	651	1724

Note: m4w = men seeking women, w4m = women seeking men

### *Procedure*

Once downloaded and saved, the advertisements were coded by a team composed of 6 research assistants. The research assistants were undergraduate psychology students. The primary researcher trained the research assistants and tested them to maximize inter-rater reliability.

All of the advertisements that were used for coding were downloaded during a period of one day, from 12:00am to 5:00pm in each respective city, the researcher and assistants downloaded all of the postings of women seeking men and men seeking women from that day, stopping at postings later than 5:00pm, and placed them into 20 separate Microsoft Powerpoint documents, giving each men seeking women and women seeking men their own Powerpoint presentation for each city, and giving each advertisement its own slide in the presentation. This procedure was followed for postings in five major cities in the United States: Boston, Seattle, Chicago, Phoenix, and Atlanta.

The primary researcher then held a training session to optimize the research assistants' ability to code data. Each research assistant was given six advertisements to code as well as a coding manual, and after some explanation, they were asked to independently code the six advertisements. The group then collaborated as a whole to discuss how they coded each advertisement and why, and how they should code similar advertisements in the future. They were then given a few more advertisements to code, and once confident that the research assistants were competent to code the actual data, the primary researcher assigned data to each



person. Each of five of the research assistants coded roughly 345 advertisements, while the sixth coded a random ten percent of each city and category for comparison with the primary coder, for the purpose of assessing interrater reliability. When all of the coding was done, the primary researcher analyzed the percent agreement on those advertisements that were coded twice and made a final decision anywhere that there were discrepancies between the two coders.

The data intended for coding was extensive, and was explicitly stated in the coding manual given to research assistants. They were asked to first report the advertisement city, the category (women for men or men for women), the title of the advertisement, and the status of the advertisement (1 = Ad present, 2 = Ad flagged for removal, 3 = Ad deleted by author). The presence/absence of photos was coded as a 0 or 1, 0 meaning there was no photo posted in the advertisement, and 1 meaning the advertisement had at least one or more photos. Photo content was analyzed separately for each photograph posted, the highest amount being four. This variable called for a rating from 0 to 10, each number carrying a different description of the photo content: 0 = No person, nature, abstract, 1 = Primarily face(s), 2 = Fully clothed body (bodies), 3 = Fully clothed with stomach and/or female cleavage exposed, 4 = Partially clothed (i.e. undergarments, lingerie or thong – no visible nipples or genitalia), 5 = No clothing, but no nipples, buttocks, or genitalia visible, 6 = visible nipples only, 7 = Visible genitalia or buttocks only, 8 = Visible nipples and genitalia and/or buttocks, 9 = person is engaging in sexual activity that is not vaginal, anal, or oral sex (regardless of how much clothing the person is wearing), 10 = Photo is portraying vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Advertisement content was assessed in a similar manner. The advertisement was assigned a number ranging from 0 to 8, and each number carried a different meaning: 0 = explicitly states is not looking for sex or is looking for nonsexual activity, 1 = irrelevant, 2 = vague about kind of sex desired (e.g. “looking to have some fun”), 3 =

“hands off” sex or masturbation only, 4 = oral sex, 5 = vaginal sex, 6 = anal sex, 7 = any other kind of sex (i.e. fetish, sadomasochism, etc.), 8 = any combination of the above. Word count was assessed by the value provided when the ad was copied and pasted into Microsoft Word. The mention of protection/birth control was coded as either 0 (no mention) or 1 (mentioned), and if mentioned, the research assistant was asked to provide in the coding spreadsheet the word(s) in the advertisement that caused him/her to code it as such. A list of example words was provided in the coding manual (see Appendix I). Specific requests about body type was coded similarly to contraception, 0 = not mentioned, 1 = mentioned. Again, if mentioned, the research assistant was asked to provide the word(s) used (e.g. sexy, attractive, BBW, etc.). A list of examples was again included, some of which came from the codes used by Wiederman in his 1993 study (see Appendix II). The mention of sexually transmitted infections (STI) was also coded as mentioned (1) or not (0). The research assistants were asked to include any STI words used, (e.g. “you must be clean), and were given a list of example words (see Appendix I). The use of or tolerance of drug use was assessed on a 0 (not mentioned) or 1 (mentioned) basis. Again, research assistants were instructed to include any drug words and were provided with a list of examples (e.g. “420 friendly,” see Appendix I). The mention of desire for resources was coded as mentioned (1) or not mentioned (0) and the words used to make that decision were included (e.g. generous, wealthy, etc) . The research assistants were given a list of words/phrases that would be coded as 1, some of which were from the codes used by Wiederman (1993; see Appendix I). The possession of resources was coded in the same manner and the same list of words was used. The age of poster was coded in two separate places, one place if they stated their age in the title and another if they stated their age in the advertisement. This was done to catch those that post two different ages in the same advertisement. The research assistants were asked to type in the age of



the target if included in the advertisement. Once all of the data was coded, it was analyzed accordingly, comparing the groups on gender.

## Results

### *Interrater Reliability*

Percent agreement was calculated for all variables in all advertisements that were coded twice; once by the primary coder, once by another coder who coded a random ten percent of all advertisements. Overall, interrater reliability was excellent. All percentages were above .75 before the primary researcher edited them, adjusting discrepancies to create 100% agreement. See table 2 for exact percentages for each variable.

Table 2. Interrater Reliability for Coding Variables Prior to Editing.

	Percent Agreement Before Editing
Poster Age in Title	.98
Ad Status	.99
Number of Ad Words	.86
Ad Content	.78
Sex of Poster	1
Sex of Target	1
Contraceptive Mention	.99
Poster Body	.94
Target Body	.87
STI Mention	.97
Poster Age in Ad	.90
Poster Resources	.78

Target Resources	.95
Drug Mention	.83
Presence of Photos	.98
Photo Content 1	.97
Photo Content 2	.99
Photo Content 3	.99
Photo Content 4	1
Total	.94

Note: Statistics are percent agreement, STI = sexually transmitted infections.

#### *Advertisement Content*

Several Chi Squares and independent samples t-tests were run to analyze the data produced in coding. The researcher hypothesized that men would be significantly more explicit in their descriptions of the kind of sex desired, and would be more likely than women to desire penetrative sexual activity (i.e. oral, anal, or vaginal sex). A Chi Square analysis found support for this hypothesis,  $\chi^2(8) = 106.62, p < .001$ . The researcher hypothesized that men would post more photographs than women, and that these photographs would be more explicit than those posted by women. A Chi Square analysis found support for this hypothesis; men were more likely than women to post a photograph,  $\chi^2(4) = 89.36, p < .001$ , and were more likely than women to post an explicit photo (i.e. partially or fully unclothed, portraying sex, etc),  $\chi^2(10) = 137.77, p < .001$  (see table 3 for overall means). Finally, an independent samples t-test was run for the number of words in advertisements. This test demonstrated that men and women do not differ in the average number of words they post in an advertisement,  $t(1682.37) = -1.21, p = .16$  (see table 4 for means).



Table 3. Coded Explicitness of Photos Based on Content.

	<i>N</i>	Mean	<i>S.D.</i>
Photo 1 Content	300	2.91	3.38
Photo 2 Content	53	4.28	3.19
Photo 3 Content	18	3.78	3.44
Photo 4 Content	11	4.09	3.81

Note: Explicitness ranged from 1 to 10, *S.D.* = standard deviation.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Age and Advertisement Words *t*-tests.

Variable	M4W ads		W4M ads		<i>t</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	
Poster Age in Title	32.84	(9.44)	25.85	(4.38)	2.34*
Poster Age in Ad	31.54	(9.59)	24.53	(3.66)	8.81*
Desired Age of Target	34.48	(11.51)	36.49	(10.31)	-1.07
Number of Ad Words	76.04	(84.87)	86.75	(52.33)	-1.21

Note: \* means differ significantly at  $p < .05$ , m4w = men seeking women, w4m = women seeking men, *SD* = standard deviation.

### *Sociobiological Theory*

The researcher hypothesized that men would be more likely than women to describe their financial resources. A Chi Square analysis found support for this hypothesis, demonstrating that men described their resources, such as their profession or availability to host, significantly more

often than women,  $\chi^2(1) = 64.31, p < .001$ . However, support was not found for the hypothesis that women would request resources in a mate more often than men; men and women did not differ in their likelihood to request acquired resources in a potential mate,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.26, p < .001$ . Men and women did differ, however, in their tendency to describe their own physical appearance in the advertisement. The researcher further hypothesized that women would be more likely to describe their appearance in the advertisement than men, but this hypothesis was not supported. A Chi Square showed that men are actually significantly more likely than women to talk about their body type and appearance,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.73, p = .01$ . There was support, however, for the hypothesis that men would talk more about the desired appearance of a target; they were significantly more likely than women to request certain physical attributes,  $\chi^2(2) = 32.40, p < .001$ . See tables 5 for all percentages.

Table 5. Percentages and Chi Squares for Risky Behavior, Appearance Variables, and Resources.

	% M4W Ads Mentioned	% W4M Ads Mentioned	$\chi^2$
Contraceptive Use	1.8	1.7	1.37
Drug Use	14.0	15.0	.19
STI	25.5	10.8	51.44*
Poster Body	50.9	44.0	6.73*
Target Body	31.7	19.1	32.40*
Poster Resources	23.6	7.1	64.31*
Target Resources	4.9	6.3	1.26

Note: \* Percents differ at  $p < .05$ , m4w = men seeking women, w4m = women seeking men, STI = sexually transmitted infections.

Independent samples t-tests were run to analyze the age of posters and the desired age of targets. The age reported in the advertisement title and that in the actual advertisement were analyzed separately to control for discrepancy. The independent samples t-test was significant,  $t(1240) = 15.93, p < .001$ , revealing that men were significantly older than women who posted (see table 4 for means). The findings were similar for the age reported by the poster in the actual advertisement. Men were again significantly older than women who posted,  $t(191.18) = 8.81, p < .001$  (see table 4 for means). This ran counter to the hypothesis that women who posted would be older than men who posted, specifically that women over 40 and men under 40 would be more likely to post. A Chi Square analysis revealed that men tend to look for women older than themselves,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.75, p = .01$  (see table 5 for percentages), whereas women tend to look for men younger than themselves,  $\chi^2(2) = 10.05, p = .01$  (see table 5 for percentages). This was inconsistent with Wiederman's finding that men tend to look for younger women and women tend to look for older men. An independent samples t-test on the desired age of a potential mate revealed that men and women do not differ in the age they seek in a target,  $t(161) = -1.07, p = .18$  (see table 4 for means).

### *Risky Behavior*

A Chi Square analysis was used to analyze the contraception variable, which took into account whether or not the poster mentioned contraceptive use. It was hypothesized that very few posts, if any, would mention contraception. The Chi Square revealed that men and women are equally unlikely to mention contraception,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.37, p = .24$  (see table 5 for percentages). Only 2.25% of posts mentioned contraception at all, and the hypothesis was therefore supported. The hypothesis that only a minority of advertisements would mention sexually transmitted infections was supported, but the hypothesis that most of these mentions would be by women



was not. Men were much more likely than women to mention sexually transmitted infections,  $\chi^2(1) = 51.44, p < .001$  (see table 5 for percentages), only about 20% of ads included this variable, 81.3% of which were men. Neither did men and women differ in their likelihood to mention drug use,  $\chi^2(1) = .19, p = .66$  (see table 5 for percentages). Many postings did, however, contain mention of drug use (15.56% of ads).

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore any differences in behavior that men and women exhibit when pursuing short-term versus long-term mating strategies. The researcher hypothesized that men and women would exhibit the same gender differences they do when pursuing serious relationship partners because of evolved preferences in mating, as described by Wiederman (1993). While a few of these hypotheses were supported, several commonly assumed sociobiological differences between men and women were not found, which arouses interest in the function of mating as a means of reproduction versus as a means of experiencing pleasure. The results of this study also made it clear that hooking up online is an incredibly risky venture, with plenty of talk of drug use and very little talk of contraception. This field of research is only beginning to scratch the surface of the many dangers posed by pursuing sex on the internet.

The researcher hypothesized that men, as they should sociobiologically be more interested than women in pursuing short-term mating strategies for the purpose of fathering many children, would post more frequently than women. This hypothesis found support in all of the cities studied except Seattle, Washington, where women posted more frequently than men. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Wiederman (1993), who found that men posted personal advertisements in the newspaper more frequently than women. The findings of this study also supported the hypothesis that men, being the more visual of the two sexes, (Bailey et



al., 1994), would post more photographs and would use more explicit photographs than women. Because according to sociobiological theory men view attractiveness as a sign of fertility (Buss & Schmitt, 1994), they seem to practice more usage of body advertisement in order to obtain a mate.

Wiederman's 1993 study on personal advertisements found that women were more likely than men to advertise an appealing body shape and attractiveness, and that men were more likely than women to request these traits. The current study only partially supported these findings. It was found that while men were significantly more likely than women to request an attractive mate, they were also significantly more likely than women to describe their appearance in an advertisement. This suggests that women become less concerned with appearing fertile when the goal of mating is not reproduction, and therefore put less effort into making their attractiveness a selling point for a potential mate. Also in contrast with Wiederman's findings, which were the basis of the researcher's hypotheses concerning age, men who posted on the casual encounters forum on Craigslist tended to be significantly older than women who posted hookup advertisements. Wiederman (1993) demonstrated that younger men (below 40 years of age) and older women (above 40 years of age) tended to post personal advertisements in newspapers, theoretically because of their less-than-ideal reproductive assets (young men would have fewer acquired resources, older women would be less fertile). The current study refuted that finding and again suggested that this difference is a phenomenon of long-term mating strategies. When the goal is simply sex, not procreation, age and fertility are of less concern.

Again counter to sociobiological theory, the hypothesis that women would be more likely than men to request a partner with acquired resources and that men would be more likely to offer resources as a selling point was only partially supported. This hypothesis was based on the

finding of Wiederman (1993) that women were indeed more concerned about resources than were men, and that men were indeed more likely to offer them. The current study found support for the latter finding, but not the former. Postings by men tended to describe acquired resources significantly more often than those posted by women, but men and women did not differ in the frequency with which they requested a partner with resources. This asset would presumably be very important to a heterosexual woman looking for an individual to father her offspring, but seems to be of little concern when it is made clear that the purpose of the encounter is “no-strings-attached” sex. Clearly, the goal of mating impacts behavior in a profound way.

It is important to note that in nearly all of the cases in which the statutes of sociobiological theory are not supported in this study, it is women who disprove the hypotheses, not men. It is not surprising that men do not tend to change their mating behavior according to the goals of sex since men tend to use short-term mating strategies as their primary method of finding a mate (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Because short-term mating strategies have solved the reproductive problems faced by men in the past, (i.e. knowing which females are fertile, investing as little resources as possible), it has become customary for men to advertise resources and pursue youth and attractiveness no matter the goal (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Women, on the other hand, are the ones who appear to change their behavior when the goal is not procreation. The long-term mating strategies typically employed by women, (i.e. resource acquisition, advertisement of youth and attractiveness; Muscarella, 2000), were not observed in the hookup advertisements analyzed for the sake of this study. The evolved gender differences posited by sociobiological theory therefore only hold up when considering long-term mating behavior. The casual encounters forum on Craigslist.org makes it clear that sometimes, sex is just sex.



The question then raised by these interesting findings, is why does this particular venue appear to be an outlet for women? One possibility is that the perceived anonymity and lack of social cues afforded by the online environment encourages disinhibition (Davis et al. 2006; Peter & Valkenburg 2007; Stern & Handel, 2001) and therefore the expression of sexual behaviors and fantasies an individual would probably not pursue otherwise (a concept known as deindividuation, coined by Zimbardo in 1969, cited in Stern & Handel, 2001). With the anonymity attained in the online world comes another wildly popular reason for using the internet to find sex partners: identity re-creation. Individuals who visit these sites are able to portray themselves in any way in which they would like to be perceived, (Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005). If the person they see in the mirror everyday is someone who they feel gets rejected by their love interests, then they can create an online profile or post an advertisement as someone they feel will be accepted. In doing so, an individual can protect his or herself from the rejection faced in the outside world. After all, the socially anxious and the lonely are some of the most common users of the internet for sexual purposes (a group who would inherently experience little reproductive success). Also a prominent group of internet users are those who lack satisfying real-world sexual relationships and those constrained in expressing their sexual needs (McKenna, Green, & Smith, 2001). This includes groups whose sexual preferences are not the mainstream preference, such as homosexuals. The fact that the women posting on Craigslist.org seem to employ short term mating strategies may therefore simply be a result of the comfort that the online environment affords to the unsure.

Past research has made it clear that the internet is a risky venue for those seeking sex (Couch & Liamputtong, 2007; Davis, Hart, Bolding, Sherr, & Elford, 2006). While this short-term mating strategy might prove to lead to reproductive success, it can also lead to reproductive

misfortune. The problems that come with using the internet for sexual purposes include internet addiction, deviant sexual misconduct, marital disruption, etc (Stern & Handel, 2001).

Furthermore, the sexually transmitted infections one could potentially acquire as a result of this behavior could in the long run destroy chances of reproduction altogether. In accordance with such information, the researcher hypothesized that only a minority of posts would mention contraception or sexually transmitted infection, and that many would mention drug use. All three of these hypotheses found support. Postings were roughly six times more likely to mention drugs than they were to mention contraception. This finding is both shocking and disconcerting.

Pursuing short-term mating strategies, though it can be sociobiologically adaptive, poses a great risk to those who employ the internet to find sex partners. Users should be made aware that copulation without commitment makes them a high risk individual and should not be taken lightly. It places them at increased risk for sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy.

### *Limitations and Call for Research*

While the current study sheds light on the preferences of Craigslist users who are searching for no-strings-attached sex, it should be noted that these results are not universally representative. First, only large cities were used in analyses and therefore cannot be generalized to smaller towns and cities. Furthermore, demographics for the individuals posting advertisements cannot be inferred. Future studies should take into account race and ethnicity for the sake of comparison. This would be possible using a survey method, which would complicate things by intruding on the online community of a group of individuals who might not appreciate their hookup posts being used for the sake of research.



Some of the perceived advantages of using the internet for sexual purposes are the sense of anonymity and the ability to create an alternate identity for the sake of making oneself look more attractive to others (Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). This in itself is a limitation of the current study. What posters say they are like and what they say they are looking for may be dissonant with their actual feelings and attitudes. It is impossible to infer that what they are listing in the advertisement is something they would really be willing to do. Furthermore, the advertisement is only the first step in communication for these online hookups. It is possible that follow-up conversations include more talk of precautionary measures or safety mechanisms, etc. It would be ideal if future research could follow these communications from the advertisement all the way to the consummation of the fantasy in order to grasp the full picture for expectations and behaviors.

It is possible that many of the posts on Craigslist.org Casual Encounters are actually spam. Especially in the women's categories (i.e. women seeking men, women seeking women), the unsuspecting target will sometimes click to respond to the advertisement and be led to another website with responses such as "I don't trust email. Go here to see my pictures!" It is therefore impossible to know without responding to these advertisements what proportion of them is actually spam. It is very possible that a substantial percentage of the female advertisements are actually designed by men to lure in other men, and are therefore unrepresentative of how women would actually behave in an online encounter situation. We do know, however, that such women exist and do engage in this behavior, based on a study performed by May (2009) in which the researcher interviewed several women who used Craigslist to find a sex partner about their experiences. Future research should find a way to

assess the percentage of posts that are actually spam, and develop conclusions with that data in mind.

During coding, the undergraduate research assistants were asked to simply code “mentioned” (1) or “not mentioned” (0) for several variables, including sexually transmitted infections, drug use, contraceptives, desired resources of the poster, desired resources of the target, appearance of the poster, and the desired appearance of the target. While knowing the prevalence of these topics within the advertisements is an integral part of this research, it would be even more informative to know whether these mentions are in favor or opposed to the variable being coded for. If, for example, of the roughly fifteen percent of ads that mentioned drug use, seventy percent are actually posting that the desired target must be drug free, it would give this variable an entirely different meaning. It would be ideal if future research kept track of the direction in which these topics lean in order to reveal more specific information about these advertisements.

Finally, we cannot infer in this research that the individuals who post on Craigslist are representative of the general population. Those individuals who use the internet to find sex partners may in fact be more compulsive than others, sexually or otherwise, and may therefore also be higher on other risky behaviors such as drug use and lack of contraceptive use. Past research has shown that high sensation-seekers and sexually-permissive individuals are more likely to use these online environments, placing themselves and others in a dangerous situation, (Valkenburg, 2007). Further research should use sexual compulsivity measures and a survey method to screen out those who are sexually compulsive, or to shed light on this group of individuals.



## Appendix I

### I. Contraceptive Words:

- Condom(s)
- Protection
- Contraception
- Birth control
- Diaphragm(s)
- Rubber(s)
- Dental dam(s)

### II. Poster/Target Body Type Words:

- BBW
- On the bigger/heavier/larger side
- Big-boned
- Thin
- Sexy
- Hot
- Gorgeous
- Attractive
- Pretty

- Beautiful
- Tall
- Short
- Pale
- Tan
- Big/large-breasted
- Waist-to-hip ratio (also code yes if given)
- Fit
- Athletic-looking
- Works out a lot/ often
- In good shape
- Above average looks
- Appealing physical appearance
- Better than average looks
- Cute
- Handsome
- Nice looks
- Pleasant looking
- Stunning
- Visually appealing
- Nice figure
- Muscular
- Petite



- Proportionate/ well-proportioned
- Shapely
- Slender
- Slim
- Well-built
- Chubby
- BBC
- Military (or affiliated groups)

III. Sexually Transmitted Infection Words:

- DDF
- DD Free
- Disease
- STD
- HIV/AIDS
- STI
- Infection
- Clean
- (any specific name of STI, including proper terms and slang)

IV. Resources of Poster/ Target:

- Wealthy
- Rich
- Job
- Well-to-do

- Affluent
- Successful
- Comfortable
- Large house/apartment/condo/hotel room
- Financially-secure
- Sugar Daddy
- Sugar Mama
- Business owner
- Employed
- Enjoys the finer things
- Financially affluent
- Financially independent
- Financially sound
- Financially stable
- Good income
- Good job
- Has a job
- Homeowner
- Secure career
- Secure job
- Solid career

V. Drug Words:

- 420 friendly



- 420
- Drunk
- High
- Intoxicated
- Trashed
- Strung out
- Hammered
- Stoned
- Toasted
- Trip(ping)
- Needle
- Pipe
- Bong
- Joint
- Blunt
- Stoner
- Pothead
- Snow
- Burnout
- (any specific name of drug, including proper names and street names)

## Resources

- Brown, G., Maycock, B., & Burns, S. (2005). Your picture is your bait: Use and meaning of cybersex among gay men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 42(1), 63-73.
- Buss, D.M., & Schmitt, D.P. (1993). Sexual strategies theory: an evolutionary perspective on human mating. *Psychological Review*, 100(2), 204-232.
- Couch, D., & Liamputtong, P. (2007). Online dating and mating: Perceptions of risk and health among online users. *Health, Risk & Society*. 9(3), 275-294.
- Couch, D., & Liamputtong, P. (2008). Online dating and mating: The use of the internet to meet sexual partners. *Qualitative Health Research*. 18(2).
- Davis, M., Hart, G., Bolding, G., Sherr, L., & Elford, J. (2006). Sex and the internet: Gay men, risk reduction, and serostatus. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*. 8(2), 161-174.
- Eysenbach, G. & Till, J. (2001) Ethical issues in qualitative research on internet communities. *British Medical Journal*. 323, 1103–1105.



- Grammer, K., Renninger, L., & Fischer, B. (2004). Disco clothing, female sexual motivation, and relationship status: Is she dressed to impress?. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 41(1), 66-74.
- Groom, C.J., & Pennebaker, J.W. (2005). The language of love: sex, sexual orientation, and language use in online personal advertisements.. *Sex Roles*, 52(7-8), 447-461.
- Horvath, K.J., Rosser, B.R., & Remafedi, G. (2008). Sexual risk taking among young internet-using men who have sex with men. *American Journal of Public Health*, 98(6), 1059-1067.
- Laumann, E. O., Gagnon, J. H., Michael, R. T., & Michaels, S. (1994). *The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United states*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Leighton Dawson, B., & McIntosh, W.D. (2006). Sexual strategies theory and internet personal advertisements. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 9(5), 614-617.
- Li, N.P., & Kenrick, D.T. (2006). Sex similarities and differences in preferences for short-term mates: what, whether, and why. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(3), 468-489.
- Lucke, J.C. (1998). Gender roles and sexual behavior among young women. *Sex Roles*,

39(3/4), 273-297.

MacCorquodale, P. L. (1984). Gender roles and premarital contraception. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 46, 57-63.

McKenna, K.Y.A., Green, A.S., & Smith, P.K. (2001). Demarginalizing the sexual self. *Journal of Sex Research*, 38(4), 302-311.

Morrison, D. (1989). Predicting contraceptive efficacy: A discriminant analysis of three groups of adolescent women. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 19, 1431-1452.

Muscarella, F. (2000). The evolution of homoerotic behavior in humans. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40(1), 51-72.

Mustanski, B.S. (2001). Getting wired: Exploiting the internet for the collection of valid sexuality data. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 38(4), 292-301.

Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P.M. (2007). Who looks for casual dates on the internet? A test of the compensation and the recreation hypotheses. *New Media & Society*, 9(3), 455-474.

Ross, M.W., Simon Rosser, B.R., McCurdy, S., & Feldman, J. (2007). The advantages and limitations of seeking sex online: A comparison of reasons given for online and offline sexual liaisons by men who have sex with men. *The Journal of Sex*



*Research*, 44(1), 59-71.

- Rusu, A.S., & Bencic, A. (2007). Choosing a mate in romania: a cognitive evolutionary psychological investigation of personal advertisements market.. *Journal of Cognitive and Behavioral Psychotherapies*, 7(1), 27-43.
- Schmitt, D.P. (2006). Short- and long-term mating strategies: additional evolutionary systems relevant to adolescent sexuality. *Romance and sex in adolescence and emerging adulthood: Risks and opportunities*, 41-47.
- Stern, S.E., & Handel A.D. (2001). Sexuality and mass media: The historical context of psychology's reaction to sexuality on the internet. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 38(4), 283-291.
- Valkenburg, P.M., & Peter, J. (2007). Who visits online dating sites? Exploring some characteristics of online daters. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*. 10(6).
- Wiederman, M.W. (1993). Evolved gender differences in mate preferences: Evidence from personal advertisements. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 14, 331-352.
- Wilson, S.B., McIntosh, W.D., & Insana, S.P. (2007). Dating across race: an examination of african american internet personal advertisements.. *Journal of Black Studies*, 37(6), 964-982.
- Yurchisin, J., Watchravesringkan, K., & McCabe, D. (2005). An exploration of identity re-creation in the context of internet dating. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 33(8), 735-750.